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ABSTRACT

The basis of self-esteem for females appears to be worth (a moral dimension of esteem related to kindness and goodness) because women are socialized to be oriented towards relationships. For males the basis of self-esteem appears to be efficacy, an instrumental dimension of esteem based on self-perceptions of accomplishments. The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which these conditions continue to exist by exploring gender differences in self-perceptions of efficacy and worth. Respondents were college students (N=94) ranging in age from 18 to 58. In response to an open-ended question asking respondents to describe their best qualitites, females were more likely to describe themselves as worthy, males as efficacious. More low self-esteem males listed efficacious traits needing improvement as compared with males with adequate self-esteem. On the other hand, low self-esteem and adequate self-esteem females did not differ in listing either worthy or efficacious traits needing improvement. Results imply counselors should work on efficacy with men in order to increase self-esteem, and counselors should work on worth with women in order to increase self-esteem. (Author/ABL)

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Male and Female Self-Esteem:
An Investigation of Worth and Efficacy

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Abstract

The basis of self-esteem for females appears to be worth (a moral dimension of esteem related to kindness and goodness) because women are socialized to be oriented towards relationships. For males, on the other hand, the basis of self-esteem appears to be efficacy, an instrumental dimension of esteem based on self-perceptions of accomplishments. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the extent to which these conditions continue to exist by exploring gender differences self-perceptions of efficacy and worth. Respondents were 94 adult students (54 females and 40 males) ranging in age from 18 to 58. In response to an open-ended question asking respondents to describe their best qualities, females were more likely to describe themselves as worthy, males as efficacious. More low self-esteem males listed efficacious traits needing improvement as compared with males with adequate self-esteem. On the other hand, low self-esteem and adequate self-esteem females did not differ in listing either worthy or efficacious traits needing improvement. Implications for counseling were discussed.

Male and Female Self-Esteem: An Investigation of Worth and Efficacy

Self-esteem has been considered an important variable in determining behavior from most, if not all, counseling perspectives (Burns, 1979). It has been suggested that females, in comparison with males, may have more problems developing adequate levels of self-esteem due to their reliance on others, rather than on self-evaluations, for self-esteem (Bardwick, 1971; Rogers, 1977). Gecas and Schwalbe (1986) identified two separate dimensions of self-esteem: self-worth (a moral dimension associated with relations with others) and self-efficacy (an instrumental dimension). The traditional male role and subsequently basis of self-esteem is associated with instrumentality whereas the traditional female role and source of self-esteem is associated with worthy relations with others (Diedrick, 1988). Males tend to define themselves in masculine (instrumental) terms whereas females tend to define themselves in worthy (relationship-oriented) terms (Broverman et al., 1972). However, because of the woman's movement there may exist changes in such self-definitions. The purpose of this study was to investigate gender differences in self-concept as related to efficacy and worth.

Self-esteem has been defined as an aspect of self-concept involving both self-evaluation and the affect associated with the resultant evaluation (Wells & Marwell, 1977). This variable has been conceptualized as important due to its motivational aspects and relation to general well-being (Burns, 1979). Although self-esteem has often been measured as a unidimensional construct, particularly in terms of self-worth, two orthogonal dimensions of self-esteem, as self-worth and self-efficacy, have been proposed (Brisset, 1972; Franks & Marolla, 1976; Gecas, 1971). These authors have suggested that the processes involved in the development and maintenance of esteem within these two areas differs, with self-worth influenced by the reflected appraisals of others, and self-efficacy determined through self-evaluation.

Self-Worth

The dimension of self-worth (also called "outer self-esteem") has been defined as a moral/social dimension and has been measured using such terms as good, nice, honest, pleasant, and generous (Franks & Marolla, 1976; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986). Brissett (1972) suggested that self-worth, or outer self-esteem, leads to feelings of connectedness with others, and of being socially accepted. Gecas (1982, p. 5) referred to self-worth as a dimensions of self-esteem based on virtue and "grounded in norms and

values concerning personal and interpersonal conduct--e.g. justice, reciprocity, honor."

It has been suggested that self-worth develops from the reflected appraisals of others (Franks & Marolla, 1976; Gecas, 1982). This is grounded in Cooley's (1902) concept of the "looking-glass self" and Mead's (1934) suggestion that self-concept develops through a process of reflected appraisals. In reviewing numerous studies testing the influence of reflected appraisals, Shrauger and Schoeneman (1979) concluded that individuals' self-perceptions correlate with perceptions of other's assessment of them but not with the actual assessments of others.

It has been suggested that the self-esteem of females depends primarily on the reflected appraisals of others whereas the self-esteem of males depends on their own appraisals of their instrumental accomplishments (Bardwick, 1971; Williams, 1977). Also, females hold a generally higher level of self-worth in terms of various social dimensions of self-esteem than do males (Offer, Ostrov, & Howard, 1977). Furthermore, females evaluate themselves more positively in terms of self-worth than in terms of self-efficacy (Franks & Marolla, 1976). Thus, it appears that this dimension of self-esteem is most important for females in general.

It has been suggested that female's reliance on others for self-esteem evolves from socialization processes and from certain innate qualities (Bardwick, 1971). As Bardwick pointed out, females are rewarded for socially-oriented behaviors, but males for achievement-oriented behaviors. Girls are raised to be more helpful, cooperative, and nuturant, than are boys, and in all societies, females are the caregivers, which leads to the raising of females to respond in ways consistant with such caregiving (Chodorow, 1974). Gilligan (1982) suggested that females identify with their primary caregiver, typically female, and that they thus maintain a connectedness with others, rather than developing a separateness as do males. Such identification and connectedness may lead to female's reliance on their relationships with others to maintain self-esteem.

Identification with mothers, rather than with fathers, may also be associated with the reliance on self-worth for females. A strong mother-feminine identification has been shown to be related to lack of achievement (Williams, 1977) and lack of achievement may be associated with lack of dependence on efficacy as a source of esteem. Closeness to fathers, identification with fathers, and encouragement from fathers in achievement-oriented behaviors, have been found to be predictive of achievement in females (Barnett & Baruch, 1978). Therefore, both identification and

and socialization processes may be involved in the development of reliance on self-worth for many females.

Finally, perceived opportunities in terms of efficacious behaviors may help account for females' reliance on self-worth. For example, Kantor (1977) found that individuals in an organization concentrated on the quality of their work as long as they perceived opportunities for advancement, but concentrated on interpersonal relationships when such opportunities were not perceived. Achievement is typically defined as success in male-oriented activities (Rivers, Barnett, & Baruch, 1979; Williams, 1977). Given women's general lack of opportunities in such achievement, it may be possible that many women turned to concentrate on interpersonal relationships.

Males are socialized to develop efficacy more than are females (Block, 1983). And because males identify with an absent figure (i.e., their fathers) they may develop a very separate sense of self along with a narrow perspective of appropriate behaviors (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982). Subsequently males appear to be oriented more towards instrumental accomplishment as compared with females (Gaeddert, 1985).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, also termed "inner self-esteem" and "self-evaluation", has been suggested as an instrumental dimension of self-esteem (Brissett, 1972; Franks & Marolla,

1976; Gecas, 1982). These authors have suggested or measured this dimension in such a way as to equate it with perceptions of competence and power. Such feelings may be more situation-specific (Gecas, 1971) than are feelings of self-worth. The conception of self-efficacy as a dimension of self-esteem is grounded in the definitions of James (1890) and Bandura (1977) as being goal-oriented and instrumental.

Related to the power one feels one has over one's environment, self-efficacy has been equated with such concepts as "mastery" and "locus of control" (Franks & Marolla, 1976; Gecas, 1982). Locus of control has been defined as the extent to which an individual perceives the self as having power over the environment (Rotter, 1966). This construct has been demonstrated to be correlated with self-esteem (Harter, 1983). Sanford and Donovan (1986) suggested that all children need to learn that they have control over their own behavior and that their behavior has impact on others and the environment in order to develop a positive level of self-esteem. These authors suggested that this equates with a sense of competence, and is learned by surpassing parental expectations. This theory equates with Brim's (1976) suggestion that the two major requirements for self-esteem are feelings of being valued by others and a sense of mastery over the environment.

Locus of control is measured on a continuim from internal (equating with perceptions of power over others and the environment) to external (equating with perceptions of lack of power over others and the environment). Baruch, Barnett and Rivers (1983) found that locus of control and self-worth, which they equated with well-being for females, was correlated with achievement in women, but was not associated with perceptions of one's love life or relations with others. Specifically, internal locus of control correlated with high levels of self-esteem. This is in line with the theory postulated by Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) that development of self-efficacy would depend on the ability to see the self-as-cause. Harter (1983) found that locus of control was not related to self-esteem (which she also terms "self-worth") for girls, although it was for boys. This supports the finding that self-esteem for females equates with the dimension of self-worth whereas for males it equates with self-efficacy (Diedrick, 1988).

The process of gaining self-efficacy is thought independent of others whereas self-worth is dependent on the evaluations of others (Franks & Marolla, 1976; Gecas, 1982). Bardwick (1971) suggested that basing esteem on others lowers esteem and inhibits personal growth. Rogers (1977) concurred and suggested that females needed to be involved in instrumental activities to develop esteem.

Efficacy generally equates with the masculine gender role involving instrumentality whereas worth equates with the feminine gender role of caregiving and nuturance. These gender roles were established over a century ago (Degler, 1981) in response to industrialization. Males continue to be socialized to be efficacious and females to be worthy (Block, 1983). Probably because of this socialization, females come to think of themselves primarily in worthy terms, males in efficacious terms (Broverman et al., 1972).

However, changes in gender role expectations have taken place since the woman's movement. To what extent do women continue to think of themselves in relation to worth and men continue to think of themselves in relation to efficacy?

Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to compare statements of personal characteristics made by males and females reflective of self-esteem level and dimension. Because it is thought that self-esteem for males is based on efficacy and for females on worth, and positive self-statements would reflect sources of esteem, the following hypotheses were made:

1. Males would be more likely than females to mention positive efficacious traits.

2. Females would be more likely than males to mention positive worthy traits.

3. Males and females would not differ in mentioning negative efficacious traits.

4. Males and females would not differ in mentioning negative worthy traits.

5. Low self-esteem males, in comparison with adequate self-esteem males, would be more likely to mention negative efficacious traits.

6 Low self-esteem males would not differ from adequate self-esteem males in listing negative worthy traits.

7. Low self-esteem females, in comparison with adequate self-esteem females, would be more likely list negative worthy traits.

8. Low self-esteem females would not differ from adequate self-esteem females in listing negative efficacious traits.

Method

It has been argued that self-esteem for males depends on efficacy whereas self-esteem for females depends on worth. The purpose of this study was to compare statements made by adult males with those made by adult females as to the degree to which those statements reflected the gender difference in source of self-esteem.

Respondents

Data was gathered in 1984 from adult males (40) and females (54) attending the University of West Florida in Pensacola. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 58. Of the respondents, 24 males and 26 females were currently employed as well as being students.

Materials

An author-constructed self-esteem scale, open-ended questions designed to elicit perceptions of positive and negative traits, and demographic questions were administered.

The global measure of self-esteem is a question asking respondents to rate their level of self-esteem on a scale of 1.0 (low) to 4.0 (high). In a subsequent pilot study, reliability was estimated. The Pearson product moment correlation was found to be .93. This measure correlates well with other self-esteem instruments (Diedrick, 1988). Adequate self-esteem was considered a score of at least 3.0 and low self-esteem was considered any score below 3.0. The sexes did not differ as to level of self-esteem.

Open-ended questions were administered to elicit self-perceptions of desirable and undesirable traits. Respondents were asked to list those qualities about themselves of which they were most proud, and those qualities that they felt needed improvement.

The responses to these questions were then coded as to whether they were efficacious or worthy. Terms listed by Broverman et al., 1972, and Gecas and Schwalbe, 1986, were used. Intelligent, strong, capable, and successful, are examples of efficacious traits. Kind, considerate, caring, warm, and emphatic, are examples of worthy traits.

Respondents were also asked to respond to questions concerning gender, age, occupational status and marital status. For more complete information see Diedrick (1984).

Procedures

Respondents were recruited in classrooms at the university and asked to stay after class if they wished to participate in a study of self-perceptions. Some students were given extra credit in their classes for participation. They were informed that they could leave the testing at any time, and were not to place their names on the questionnaires. Subjects were also informed that they could ask questions at any time during or after filling out the questionnaires.

Results

Responses from 53 females and 37 males who had completed all questions were analyzed. Males mentioned a total of 59 positive efficacious traits (averaging 1.59 per male) and females mentioned a total of 36 (averaging .66 per female). On the other hand, females described themselves by

mentioning a total of 135 positive worthy traits (averaging 2.5 per female) as compared with males who mentioned 53 positive worthy traits (averaging 1.43 per male). Thus females described themselves using almost four times more worthy than efficacious traits, but a comparable difference did not exist for males.

Males listed a total of 34 efficacious traits needing improvement (an average of .92 per male) compared with females who listed 29 such traits (an average of .54 per female). Males listed 29 worthy traits needing improvement (averaging .78 per male) whereas females listed 65 worthy traits needing improvement (averaging 1.2 per female). Thus, again, females were twice as likely to list a worthy trait as an efficacious trait needing improvement, but little difference existed for males. These results indicate the importance of worthiness for females.

To test the hypotheses, t-tests for testing proportions were calculated. It was found that males (83%) were more likely than females (47%) to mention a positive efficacious trait, t (88) = 3.75, $p<.05$. Females (100%) were more likely than males (76%) to mention a positive worthy trait, t (88) = 3.43, $p<.05$. Males (59%) did not differ significantly from females (42.5%) in listing at least one efficacious trait needing improvement, t (88) = 1.52, $p>.05$. Also, males (57%) did not differ significantly from females

(65%) in listing at least one worthy trait needing improvement, t (88) = .93, $p>.05$.

As expected, low self-esteem males (100%) were more likely to list at least one efficacious trait needing improvement as compared with males with an adequate level of self-esteem (50%), t (35) = 5.56, $p<.05$. Also as expected the low self-esteem male group (43%) did not differ from the adequate self-esteem male group (60%) in listing at least one worthy trait to improve, t (35) =.85.

Contrary to expectations, low self-esteem females (71%) did not differ from adequate self-esteem females (61%) in listing at least one worthy trait to improve, t (51) = .59, $p>.05$. However, as expected, low self-esteem females (57%) were as likely as adequate self-esteem females (35%) to list at least one efficacious trait needing improvement, t (51) = 1.2, $p>.05$.

Discussion

Females were more likely than males to perceive themselves as having positive worthy traits, and males were more likely that females to perceive themselves as having positive efficacious traits. It was also interesting that 100% of the females in this study listed at least one positive worthy trait, indicating females' orientation towards relationships with others. The results of this study add support to the contention that females are more

oriented towards relationships than are males and consequently are more likely to derive esteem from worth (Bardwick, 1971; Diedrick, 1988).

Because males appear to derive self-esteem primarily from self-efficacy (Bardwick, 1971; Diedrick, 1988) it was not surprising that 100% of those males with low self-esteem listed at least one efficacious trait they wished to enhance. But if females depend on worth for self-esteem why did the low self-esteem females not differ from those with adequate self-esteem in wishing to improve at least one worthy trait? One possibility is that females are so oriented towards relationships and the development of worth that even when self-esteem is adequate females continue to aim at perfectionism. During coding it was noted that females tended to list the same affiliative traits as their best qualities and as the qualities they needed to improve. In fact, it appears females must first develop a high sense of worth in order to develop a sense of self-efficacy (Diedrick, 1988).

Despite the women's movement which emphasizes the development of efficacy in women (Rivers, Barnett, & Baruch, 1979), women appear to continue be oriented towards relationships and probably to rest esteem on the success they have in such relationships. Success in relationships depends highly on the traits (empathy, compassion, etc.)

women listed both in terms of their most desirable traits and those traits needing improvement. The importance of worthiness to females cannot be underestimated.

Despite Bardwick's (1971) argument that women cannot develop adequate self-esteem when they rest esteem upon relationships, gender differences in level of self-esteem have not been found (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Yet therapists have noted that women are more likely than men to complain about lack of self-esteem (Sanford & Donovan, 1986). It may be, if women tend to be more perfectionist than men, that even an adequate level of self-esteem is inadequate to women because of their aspiration to perfection.

Females continue to be oriented towards relationships and derive esteem from worthy accomplishments, yet a large number of females may seek perfection in this respect. Men continue to be oriented towards and derive esteem from instrumental accomplishments. Implications for those who do counseling exist. First, to help men increase self-esteem, work on efficacy (rather than worth) would appear most appropriate and productive. Second, to help women increase self-esteem, work on worth, rather than efficacy, may be more productive. But it may also be necessary to address the need for perfectionism, particularly if the woman's self-worth is already adequate. Of course such advise is based on men and women in general and differences in the

basis of self-esteem would be expected to exist for some individuals. Consequently, exploring the basis of self-esteem would be advised prior to any decision concerning a plan of action.

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